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By Margaret Davis

**U**TAH can be easily overlooked among the huge range of holiday destinations on offer in a country as vast as the United States.

But the western state – perhaps best known for skiing and winter sports – is a breathtaking rocky wilderness when there is no snow on the ground.

Its landscape ranges from Alpine-esque mountains to the red rock made famous by the movie *Thelma And Louise* and legendary cowboy actor John Wayne.

In early October we were treated to the blazing reds and yellows of the autumn leaves – a perfect backdrop for pony trekking in the foothills nearby.

It was a fun and novel way to see the countryside, and meant we could avoid crawling up steep

slopes ourselves. There could not have been a better remedy to soothe away the shop-soiled feeling of long-haul flights and jet lag.

Fly-fishing is also on offer nearby, while more sedate visitors can

sample a unique geological feature.

The Homestead Resort, opposite Zermatt in Midway, boasts a natural crater filled with warm spring water all year round, encased by a beehive dome of rock.

Further south, the landscape radically changes with Grand Canyon-style scenery.

Fuel yourself up for a walk at Ray's in Green River, a genuine American road house with pool tables,

jukebox and great burgers.

This is the beginning of film-set style surroundings which leave visitors with a huge smile – and stopping every two minutes to take photos.

Dead Horse Point, half a mile from where the dramatic climax of *Thelma And Louise* was filmed, gives a jaw-dropping view, looking out over the Colorado River.

Without the water, you could be forgiven for thinking you were on Mars.

The spine-tingling sights continue in Arches National Park, with its monoliths and sheer rock faces. Utah is simply vast, and it is a unique feeling to be

surrounded by yawning miles of natural landscape.

But visitors do not just come to stand and stare. A wide range of outdoor activities are available throughout the year.

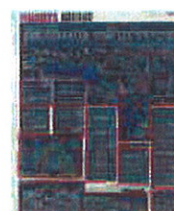
For the more adventurous holidaymaker, there is white-water rafting on the Colorado River, led by expert guides who steer rubber vessels between the rocks.

It's genuine fun for any group, with stretches of calm, flat water punctuated by adrenalin-pumping rapids. The ride is like a log flume crossed with a rollercoaster.

Moab, the small town where raft operator Sheri Griffiths is based, attracts hordes of active types all

through the summer and has a sprinkling of shops, bars and restaurants which cater for the crowds.

It has a friendly and welcoming feel, including great Mexican food and Miguel's Baja Grill, but if you fancy a few drinks after dinner remember to take ID with you. In some bars you may also need to become a member and pay a fee of a few dollars, or buy a bowl of fries





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or nachos to have with your drinks. Although Moab is a town, it is really all about the natural landscape. Parts of Thelma And Louise were filmed in the surrounding area, including where

the pair blow up a truck. There is also the slightly unnerving sight of the deserted town of Cisco, which once thrived but where a only a handful of people now live. Once you've finished soaking up the atmosphere around Moab, a more relaxed river expedition awaits on the San Juan River, leaving from Bluff.

The archaeological trip will see your guide explain the spectacular geology of the surrounding area, with stops to see ancient paintings and ruins on the way.

Another great place to embrace the great outdoors is Capitol Reef National Park, which has a variety of hikes.

The Sulphur Canyon route, classed as moderate, was mostly easy going but we visited when the river water was "higher than it had been for five years" according to our guide Scott.

This meant a good deal more scrambling over rock ledges and climbing down fairly steep drops than intended, but it was fantastic fun. Just make sure no-one minds getting their shoes and trousers thoroughly drenched.

Coming back to urban surroundings, Salt Lake City is a pleasant and nicely laid-out town, with chances for fine dining and a night out in a bar, as well as good shopping during the day.

So when you plan your next holiday, give Utah a chance - you'll come back fully refreshed and fired up with a new enthusiasm for the outdoors.

## TRAVEL FACTS

MARGARET was a guest of Utah Office of Tourism and she flew to Salt Lake City via Chicago with United Airlines.

United Vacations offers seven-night fly-drive visits to Utah this summer from £565, including return flights into Salt Lake City (via Chicago), free connecting flights into London from six regional UK airports, and seven days's fully-inclusive car rental (tax

and car insurance included). For United Vacations reservations call 0844 499 2299 or visit [www.unitedvacations.co.uk](http://www.unitedvacations.co.uk).



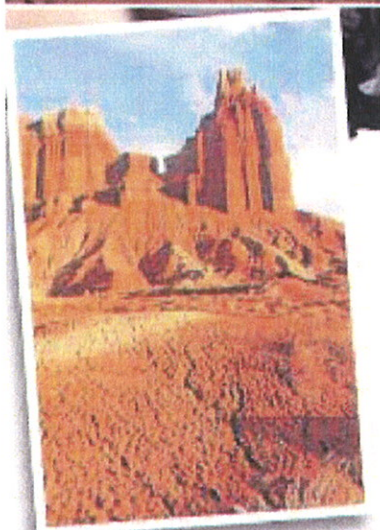
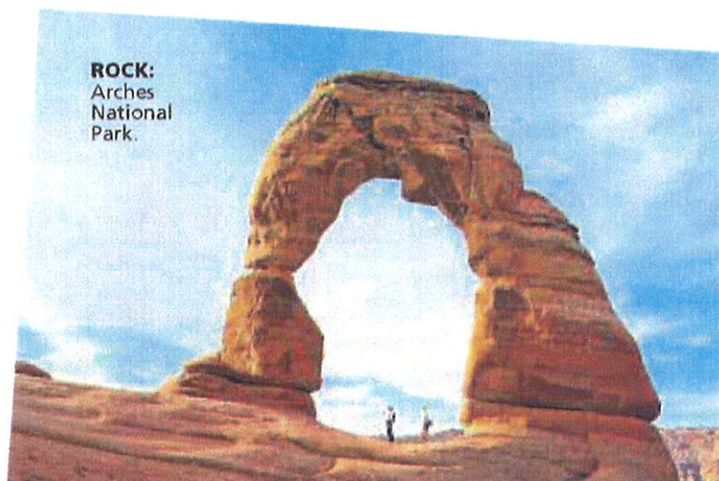
**OUTDOOR:** Moab attracts hordes of active people.



**CAPITAL:** Salt Lake County, Utah.

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**SANDSTONE:** Chimney Rock at Capitol Reef is a popular attraction.